

Funding Proposal

The Saskatchewan Legacy FY 2011 - 2013

A WATERFOWL HABITAT CONSERVATION PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

by

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May 2010



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands



DUCKS UNLIMITED



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Ducks Unlimited Mission

"Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people."

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is the world leader in wetland conservation. Since 1938, DU has invested over 1 billion dollars in conserving habitat for waterfowl and wildlife in the United States, Canada and Mexico. In Canada alone, DU has completed over 8,400 habitat projects, securing 6.0 million acres and positively influencing 47 million acres of habitat. Many species of wildlife, including many threatened or endangered species, live and flourish on DU projects.

Prairie Pothole Region of Canada

The Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is rated one of the highest priority areas for waterfowl conservation in North America by DU, internationally, and DU has committed more resources to this area than any other region in North America. It is estimated that up to seventy per cent of the continent's waterfowl breed in this region. This area is particularly critical for mallard, northern shoveler, gadwall, northern pintail, blue-winged teal, American wigeon, canvasback, and redhead.

The PPR of Canada encompasses 212,000 square miles, stretching from the Peace Lowlands of northwestern Alberta southeast to southwestern Manitoba. When the glaciers from the last ice age receded across this landscape more than 10,000 years ago, they left millions of shallow depressions that today are wetlands known as prairie potholes. These fertile wetland complexes, rich in plant and aquatic invertebrate life, support populations of breeding waterfowl unmatched anywhere in the world.

DU has an aggressive conservation strategy to meet our continental vision. This strategy strives to restore the productive capacity of the PPR for breeding waterfowl and focuses on four habitat goals.

Protection of Existing Wetland Habitats

Restoration of Lost Wetlands

Protection of Existing Upland Habitats

Restoration of Lost Upland Habitats



THE HABITAT CHALLENGE

Native grassland and wetland habitats have been lost and degraded in the PPR for over a century. Soon after European settlement began in the late 1800s much of the pristine grassland was broken for agriculture. As the agricultural industry grew through the 1900s many of the prairie potholes were drained to make room for further cultivation. Based on historical landscape analyses, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) estimates that in some of the key waterfowl production landscapes, as much as 90% of prairie wetlands have been drained in the past 100 years. The persistent loss of wetlands and natural upland cover combine to form a significant threat to the long term productive capacity of the landscape for waterfowl. It is DU's challenge to deliver programs that protect existing habitats, restore what has been lost, and develop new habitats that are compatible with the agricultural landscape in which they occur.

Wetlands are critical to attract ducks to the landscape and they provide habitat for successful brood production. Intact uplands (grasslands or haylands) are important to ensure suitable nesting habitat.

DUC's focus in Saskatchewan continues to be on the protection and restoration of small prairie wetlands and the protection and restoration of upland nesting cover.

DUC uses a combination of strategically targeted direct program, agricultural extension and public policy efforts to advance its conservation goals. Direct habitat programs such as land acquisition and conservation easements help to secure the remaining habitat base, and provide restoration opportunities. Agricultural extension programs focus on adding nesting cover and/or improving wetland conditions, while the promotion of waterfowl-friendly agricultural practices provide positive economic benefits to producers.

As agricultural and industrial pressures continue to increase, it is becoming more important for DUC to focus on retaining existing habitat while adding and improving breeding habitat. DUC has a secondary focus on retention and restoration of major staging and moulting marshes that maintain the integrity of spring and fall migration events.



PRIORITY AREA

Saskatchewan Prairie Pothole Region



Figure 1. Prairie Pothole Region of Western Canada

At the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) are the moraine habitats that concentrate waterfowl during the breeding season. These moraine landforms support wetland densities over 100 ponds per square mile and attract waterfowl at densities over 100 pairs per square mile under average conditions. There are 27 target moraine areas in Saskatchewan of which 6 are the current priorities for program delivery. The Missouri Coteau, Allan/Dana Hills, Thickwood Hills, Touchwood Hills, Upper Assiniboine, and Lightning Creek landscapes offer the best opportunity for successful and impacting waterfowl habitat programs. Each priority area offers unique values to waterfowl providing the building blocks to add conservation programs that will improve the overall productive capacity for waterfowl.

Table 1. Program Accomplishments 2009-10

Program	2009-10 Goal	2009-10 Total	% Accomplished
Habitat Retention	18,200	19,650	108
Wetland Restoration	0	0	N/A
Upland Restoration	13,400	13,634	102
Total	31,600	33,284	105

The Saskatchewan prairies and parklands surrounding the priority areas are an expanse of mixed grassland, shrubland, woodland, cropland and wetlands. This area contains more than 1.5 million wetlands including over 600 DU wetland projects. These DU projects are essential to the breeding grounds and also critical staging and moulting habitat for ducks and geese in Saskatchewan. The future of the northern pintail and other upland nesting waterfowl hinges greatly on the recovery of the Saskatchewan PPR through broad landscape grassland restoration programs and positive agricultural policy advancements.

In the previous contract with LDWF, DUC positively **impacted 33,284 acres** (Table 1), in the Missouri Coteau and surrounding prairies.

TARGETING AND WATERFOWL

Targeting

DUC has developed a waterfowl distribution model based on long-term waterfowl population data and wetland inventory. This tool allows DU to target its conservation programs to areas that will have the highest duck pair densities. DUC applies direct program to areas that support a minimum long term average of 40 pairs of breeding ducks (mallard, northern pintail, shoveler, gadwall, blue-winged teal, canvasback and redhead) per square mile. The priority areas far exceed this minimum criterion over most of the landscape (Figure 2).

Once DUC has determined where to work, programs are then tailored to existing land use determined by the type of land cover, its current condition, and waterfowl needs. Areas with significant perennial cover are targeted for hay programs to secure and restore wetlands and improve the condition of native cover. Areas with wetland densities and significant agricultural activity are targeted for wetland retention and programs to restore perennial cover or increase fall seeded cereals such as winter wheat.

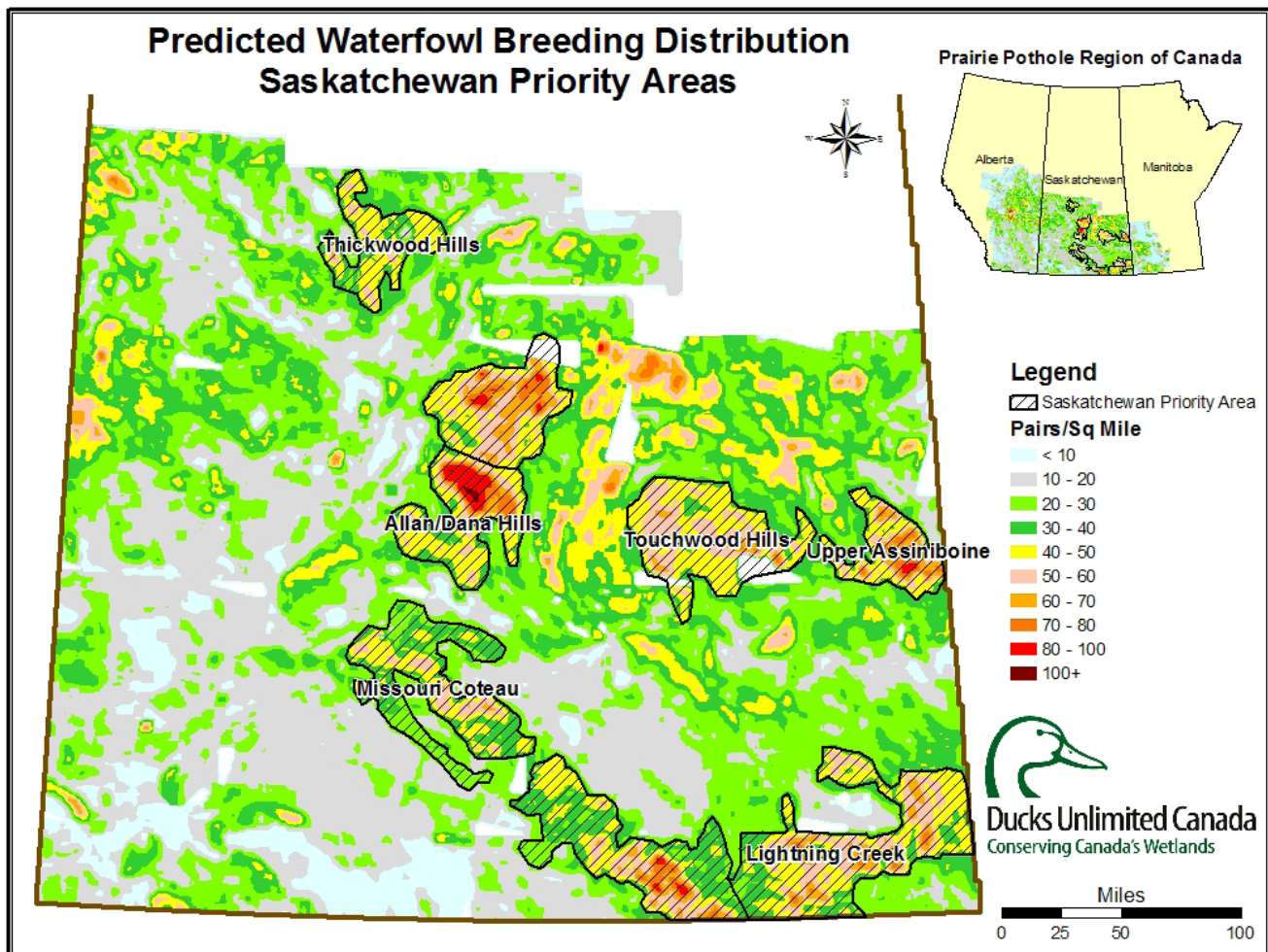


Figure 2. Predicted waterfowl breeding pair densities in the PPR of Saskatchewan.

Waterfowl

Waterfowl band recovery data has established a clear link between waterfowl produced and banded in the PPR of Canada and subsequently harvested in the Mississippi Flyway. Saskatchewan, and the priority areas in particular, stand out as the primary Canadian sources of ducks harvested in Louisiana (Figure 3).

Based on trends in the May U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services/Canadian Wildlife Services waterfowl survey data it is clear the majority of the decline in continental dabbling duck populations has come from those birds that typically settle in Prairie Canada. Given that the priority areas of Saskatchewan have some of the highest breeding densities in the Prairies, this area is critical to the recovery of these ducks.



Figure 2. Origin of ducks harvested in Louisiana from 1986 - 2005. Note that this data is not corrected for banding effort.

The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) has been a successful collaboration of over 200 Canadian and U.S. partners supporting and delivering programs to over 20,000 producers across the PPR of Canada. PHJV partners have impacted nearly 11 million acres. Over the first 20 years of PHJV implementation, directly attributable to partner achievements, the waterfowl recovery of prairie Canada is estimated at about 25% of North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) production goals.

Industry Partners

DUC has led the expansion of winter wheat across prairie Canada and into the northern United States. DUC announced a partnership with Bayer CropScience that will see the investment of \$20 million over five years into winter wheat varietal research, promotion of improvements and research in agronomic practices, waterfowl and environmental research and marketing in the Prairie Pothole Region of Canada and United States. This partnership brings valuable agricultural investment into an already successful joint venture program.

North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) Funding

Ducks Unlimited has worked closely with many private and government partners to establish and maintain a critical funding source for wetland conservation on the waterfowl breeding grounds of North America. A recent change in NAWCA now allows for Canadian source funds to act as match for NAWCA. This change in the act improves the ability to access NAWCA funds. However the act requires a minimum of 50% nonfederal US source funding, placing additional attention on the need for continued US support. State funding from LDWF and the other 33 state partners play a critical role leveraging NAWCA funding and securing the future of habitat conservation on the breeding grounds of Canada.



LANDSCAPE HABITAT GOALS

Protect and Restore

For over 70 years, DUC has worked hard at conserving habitat within Saskatchewan. Traditional strategies have made important gains but the future depends on using new approaches to protect and restore habitat in the face of a dominant agricultural industry. To meet the challenge the *Saskatchewan Conservation Plan* was developed to meet conservation goals.

Programs are targeted to areas of highest duck densities. Within these areas cost-effective programs that increase waterfowl productivity while working towards long-term sustainability are delivered. Partnerships with producer groups and government agencies broaden conservation program impact and awareness. All programs are monitored and evaluated through an adaptive management process to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Habitat improvements are accomplished through the delivery of programs that positively influence DUC's four habitat initiatives. Programs are organized by the intent of the program and are referred to as initiatives:

Initiatives

Habitat Retention

Drainage of wetlands and breaking of native uplands continues to be the most significant activities negatively impacting waterfowl. DUC uses a variety of program tools to protect remaining critical habitats, which are vital to the long-term productivity of the Saskatchewan landscape. Habitat retention activities are captured within three primary efforts:

1) Conservation Easements and Agreements protect habitats on private lands through programs offering financial incentives for varying levels of protection. These programs range in cost from \$20/acre for 10 year agreements up to \$320/acre for perpetual easements. DU plans to protect 2000 acres in FY 2011-13.

2) Land purchase is the most intensive program that DU delivers and is a very important tool to protect high risk, high valued habitats. The cost of purchasing land continues to rise and DU will invest strategically to ensure the greatest waterfowl benefits are derived. DU plans to purchase 1200 acres with the Louisiana contribution.

3) Rangeland stewardship programs are designed to positively impact the large blocks of native grasslands in the priority areas under the control of private ranches. To protect these lands from loss, unique partnerships with ranchers are employed. Conservation agreements addressing the protection of existing native prairie habitats while offering incentives for environmentally sound improvements are the main focus. The FY 2011-13 program goal is to secure 18,000 acres for a minimum of 10 years.

4) Wetland Rebuilds is a re-investment into existing wetland projects that have been evaluated as highly productive and successful for waterfowl. These projects have met and surpassed their original design and agreement terms and required new infrastructure and agreements to ensure their productive capacity for another 30 years. DU will resign all of the landowners on the project and construct the required physical improvements to maximize wetland productivity and waterfowl recruitment. The goal for this program would be to rebuild 400 acres of wetland project habitat.

LANDSCAPE HABITAT GOALS

Protect and Restore



Wetland Restoration

Most wetland restoration work will occur on private lands. Nearly 70 years of program delivery has taught DUC that it takes a combination of intensive and extensive programs to successfully work with producers. Many wetlands are difficult to drain and are valued by landowners. However thousands of wetlands have been lost in our priority area and surrounding lands currently limiting the productive capacity of prairie Canada. DUC is currently using other programs such as conservation easements, forage conversion and rangeland stewardship to initiate efforts to restore wetlands. The FY 2011-13 goal for wetland restoration is 50 basins or approximately 100 acres.



Upland Restoration

Duck nest success is one of the most influential factors impacting continental waterfowl populations. Improving nest success in the priority areas will require the restoration of nesting cover. DUC will focus efforts on increasing the availability of better quality cover in the priority areas through its two programs.

1) Forage conversion programs will be delivered in partnership with agriculture industry, and provincial government programs. Due to slowly recovering cattle prices and soft hay markets there is limited but growing interest by farmers in seeding new acres of grass. The goal for this program is 3000 acres which is lower than usual but maybe ramped up as the cattle industry strengthens.

2) Saskatchewan contains over 60 million acres of privately held farm land. In an average year there is approximately 12 million acres of wheat planted. Due to the direct efforts of DUC, supported by many funding partners, winter wheat acreage has increased in Saskatchewan from 100,000 acres 20 years ago to nearly 300,000 acres last fall.

DUC's **winter wheat** programs focus on the agronomic and economic benefits of the crop to the producer. Approaches vary from supporting research to developing new varieties that are more successful in the Canadian prairies, to working more directly with the producers through incentive or extension programs. The FY 2011-13 goal in these priority areas is 15,000 acres of winter wheat.



LANDSCAPE HABITAT GOALS

Protect and Restore



Habitat Asset Management

Over the past 70 years, DU has delivered millions of acres of habitat programs. Most of these projects require additional attention after they are completed to ensure their long term production value. These activities are called Habitat Asset Management (HAM) efforts. HAM activities include wetland control operations, nesting cover management, habitat inspections and agreement compliance. Current program inventory in the priority areas and surrounding landscapes is over 1,000,000 acres. Each project requires some level of asset management on an annual basis.



FUNDING AND BUDGET

Saskatchewan Conservation Plan

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) State Grant contributions provide the critical first dollar which leavers additional funding that drives Canadian waterfowl habitat conservation. Over the past 2 years with the support of LDWF, Ducks Unlimited conserved, enhanced and restored **33,284 acres** and influenced and additional 152,686 acres.

Ducks Unlimited invites the LDWF to continue this important partnership and consider contributions in FY2011 - 13 towards the conservation and restoration of North America's most productive waterfowl habitat found in the priority areas of Saskatchewan. A contribution from Louisiana of 75% of the State legislated funding, approximately equivalent to \$250,000 annually, will be matched by Ducks Unlimited, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and other U.S. and Canadian sources.

LDWF's contribution of \$250,000 will be **leveraged five-fold**, enabling DUC to put **\$1,250,000** annually towards conserving **critical waterfowl habitat** on North America's breeding grounds. The conservation of this vital habitat will help ensure that the Louisiana hunter experiences strong waterfowl flights from Saskatchewan for many years to come.

DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA FUNDING PROPOSAL

Partners	Revenue	Total Revenues
LDWF	\$250,000	\$750,000
DU	\$250,000	\$750,000
NAWCA	\$500,000	\$1,500,000
Sub-Total	\$1,000,000	\$3,000,000
Other Contributions	\$250,000	\$750,000
Total	\$1,250,000	\$3,750,000

*As in the past, Ducks Unlimited will match LDWF's contribution, combine it with other non-federal partner funds and ensure that the combined amount is matched with federal funds under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. A Canadian partner commitment of an additional 25% from DUC, Canadian federal and provincial governments and other NGO's is applied as per the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

FUNDING AND BUDGET

SASKATCHEWAN PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION

PROGRAM BUDGET FY 2011 - 13

Conservation Goals/Programs	Proposed Program (ac)	Proposed Costs
1. Habitat Retention	21,600	\$2,100,000
2. Wetland Restoration	100	\$100,000
3. Upland Restoration	18,000	\$662,500
4. Habitat Asset Management	156,000*	\$937,500
Total	39,850	\$3,750,000

* Habitat Asset Management acres are not included in the total acre goals.

Completion of this proposal will add valuable pair and nesting habitat for thousands of ducks and geese each year. Your contribution will help protect, conserve and restore critical waterfowl habitat on private farmlands. It is only through the support of partners like the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that makes this possible.

"CONTINUING THE LEGACY"

The PHJV Implementation Plan contains habitat objectives designed to restore the waterfowl production capacity of the Canadian Prairies to that of the 1970s, a time when landscape conditions were capable of sustaining abundant populations of prairie waterfowl. Partnerships are key to realizing the goals of this plan and the LDWF has played an important role in ensuring the success of DUC's conservation efforts in Canada. The Canadian Prairies remain a landscape under siege. Wetland drainage and native prairie destruction continues in many of the high waterfowl densities areas. Inadequate habitat protection legislation drives DU to deliver strong habitat protection programs. Within our waterfowl priority areas, remaining native habitat must be protected, landscape impacts must be restored and more sustainable agricultural practices must be employed. The support of the LDWF in achieving this mission is extremely important and greatly appreciated.